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External evaluation of UNCTAD subprogramme 5: Africa, least developed countries and special programmes[1]

Executive summary

The Trade and Development Board, at its sixty-second annual session, requested the UNCTAD secretariat to conduct an independent evaluation of subprogramme 5 on Africa, least developed countries and special programmes (SP5). Using a mixed-methods approach with triangulated data, the evaluation assessed the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, partnerships and human rights and gender equality aspects of SP5 in the period 2013–2017.

Most stakeholders suggested that SP5 and its outputs, including publications, technical cooperation and consensus-building efforts, were highly relevant to the UNCTAD mandates on trade and development. SP5 contributed to the achievement of four Sustainable Development Goals, namely 8, 9, 10 and 17, among others, linked to its results during the evaluation period. SP5 has made substantial progress on most of its stated outcomes. Stakeholders were generally positive with regard to SP5 products, although some variations in utility across outputs were observed. Research is at the heart of the work of SP5, yet requests for technical cooperation were expressed more frequently. In that regard, there may be a mismatch between the needs and expectations of stakeholders and the products and services provided under SP5. There appears to be a general consensus among stakeholders that the current strategy and resources of SP5 need to be realigned and its portfolio rebalanced, to help address the challenges faced by beneficiary countries and stakeholders.

During the evaluation period, the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes (ALDC) provided important inputs on geographical indications, which contributed to negotiations on the Continental Free Trade Area in Africa. ALDC also contributed with regard to the establishment of the Djibouti–Ethiopia corridor; to policies on trade integration in Ethiopia, the Gambia, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger and Senegal; and to advances in fisheries sectors, for example in Mozambique and Uganda.

[1] This evaluation was prepared by an independent evaluation team: Mr. Punit Arora, with Mr. Edouard Jay, Ms. Neema Manongi and Mr. John Mathiason. Supporting materials for this evaluation are presented in document TD/B/WP(76)/CRP.2.

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The contributions of SP5 are acknowledged, and ALDC is encouraged to rebalance its portfolio and fine-tune its strategy by placing increasing emphasis on technical cooperation and follow-up support. ALDC should also make sustainability considerations an integral part of its interventions. In addition, ALDC should develop a strategy for raising extrabudgetary resources to increase its technical cooperation activities. Finally, the secretariat should undertake an evaluation of workplans and budgets to manage interdivisional human resources-related and financial allocations.

UNCTAD in general, and ALDC in particular, have recently undertaken a number of steps to promote collaboration and partnerships, yet much remains to be done, including developing an overarching road map of partnerships at the institutional level. There is also a need to increase incentives for staff to actively seek collaboration, both in-house and with other United Nations entities. In line with ongoing United Nations reform efforts, an effort should be made to increase the presence of UNCTAD on United Nations country teams in all countries in which UNCTAD carries out substantial work. ALDC should improve its results-based monitoring system, to prioritize the measurement of outcomes and impacts. Finally, UNCTAD and ALDC should demonstrate a stronger commitment, develop in-house capacity, allocate sufficient resources and develop strategic partnerships to deliver on the human rights and gender equality mandates and commitments of the United Nations.

I. Introduction

A. Background

1. International cooperation in trade and development is vital for global economic growth and the economic development of developing countries. UNCTAD, established in 1964, is a knowledge-based organization for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development. UNCTAD carries out its work through an approach that maximizes synergies between its three pillars of research and analysis, technical cooperation and consensus-building.

2. ALDC is vested with substantive responsibility for SP5, which aims to progressively and beneficially integrate Africa, least developed countries and other groups of countries in special situations (landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and other structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies) into the global economy through the development of national policies and international support measures to build productive capacities for economic development and poverty reduction. SP5 is implemented in accordance with the strategy detailed under Programme 10 on trade and development of the United Nations biennial programme plan for 2018–2019.[2] ALDC consists of two branches, on trade and poverty and on research and policy analysis, and has 32 staff members.

3. ALDC produces two of the eight flagship reports of UNCTAD, namely the *Economic Development in Africa Report* and *The Least Developed Countries Report*, as well as other research, for example on trade and poverty, rules of origin, geographical indications and market access. The policy recommendations and findings from research analysis are made available to member States as a basis on which to negotiate agreed outcomes. The recommendations and complementary policy briefs are also intended for consideration by member States in policymaking at national and/or regional levels. ALDC also provides support for intergovernmental deliberations on key national and international issues.

4. ALDC also provides request-driven technical cooperation, based on priorities established by beneficiaries, and implemented by staff through the Enhanced Integrated Framework. ALDC has been active in implementing Development Account projects to develop policy responses to specific needs. Donor contributions to ALDC were around

[2] A/71/6 (Prog. 10).

$5 million in 2011–2017.[3] The Framework has been the most important source of extrabudgetary contributions, at 40 per cent; other significant funding has been received from the European Union, in particular for a recently-launched project in Angola.

B. Theory of change

5. The logical framework and its underlying theory of change, and project documents,[4] show that SP5 addresses in particular the challenge of a lack of knowledge and capacity among member States in Africa, the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and other structurally weak, vulnerable and small economies. The most significant assumption underlying the work of SP5 is the need for a special geographic focus on countries that face structural limitations. Its work may be classified under the three pillars of research and analysis, technical cooperation and consensus-building.

C. Purpose, scope and methodology of the evaluation

6. The Trade and Development Board, at its sixty-second annual session, requested the UNCTAD secretariat to conduct an independent evaluation of SP5.[5] The evaluation used the methodology of the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, partnerships and human rights and gender equality aspects of SP5 in the period 2013–2017. The evaluation was forward-looking and balanced the need for organizational learning with the accountability of UNCTAD to member States.

7. In consultation with ALDC management, the evaluation team revised the SP5 results matrix or log frame, to ensure that it more fully accorded with United Nations Evaluation Group guidelines. The evaluation followed a mixed-methods, inclusive and participatory approach with adequate triangulation to arrive at credible, reliable and unbiased findings. It utilized a mixture of primary and secondary data sources. A desk review of more than 300 documents and archival data available from UNCTAD and partner organizations provided the initial background, and consultations at headquarters; textual analysis; an online survey; field missions to Cambodia, Ethiopia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic; interviews with key stakeholders and focus group discussions provided independent information.[6] The field missions, intended to represent the full scope of work under SP5, were selected following consideration of various factors, such as geographical focus, country category, level of engagement in the region, variety of development stages and scope of delivery for research projects. Using semi-structured instruments,[7] the evaluation team consulted a wide variety of stakeholders, including existing and potential partners, beneficiaries, government officials, delegates, research institutions and representatives of non-governmental organizations. In total, 139 stakeholders were interviewed in person or by telephone and three focus group discussions were undertaken with staff members and five with regional representatives of member States. Using a stratified random sampling strategy, 180 stakeholders, comprising 60 non-divisional staff members and 120 external stakeholders that included representatives of member States, donors, collaborators and trainees were invited to take the online survey.[8] Of these, 93 stakeholders completed the survey, 71 per cent of which were men, and the average age of respondents was 49 years.

[3] TD/B/WP(76)/CRP.2, annex VIII, figure 1.
[4] Ibid, annex I and annex VIII, figure 2.
[5] Ibid, annex II.
[6] Ibid, annex III.
[7] Ibid, annex IV.
[8] Ibid, annex VIII, figure 3.

Limitations

8. SP5 does not systematically collect data on the outcomes and impacts of its work or on human rights and gender equality aspects. Further, during some field missions, a limited number of stakeholders were available for consultations. The evaluation relied on the triangulation of data sources, including consultations with a wide range of stakeholders by telephone and through the survey, and systematically collected anecdotal evidence to mitigate these limitations.

II. Findings

A. Relevance

9. Relevance broadly pertains to the strategic fit achieved by SP5 in assisting UNCTAD to deliver on its mandates; the better the fit between strategy and context, the greater the continued relevance of the programme and policies to UNCTAD and its key stakeholders.

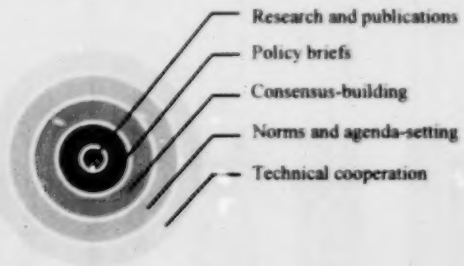
10. Most stakeholders suggested that SP5 and its outputs, including publications and technical cooperation and consensus-building efforts, were highly relevant to the UNCTAD mandates on trade and development. In the period covered by the evaluation, ALDC operated under the Doha Mandate and the Nairobi Maafikiano. The Nairobi Maafikiano states that UNCTAD should strengthen its special focus on the trade and development needs of the least developed countries across all areas of its mandate, in accordance with the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action) and other relevant outcomes on the least developed countries.[9] Further, the Nairobi Maafikiano refers in particular to the other regions and countries within the scope of the mandate of ALDC, namely Africa, including through support for the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development; landlocked developing countries, including through support for the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024; small island developing States, including through support for the implementation of the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway; and structurally weak and vulnerable small economies.[10]

11. With regard to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, UNCTAD coordinates work related to achieving target 12.6 and is a partner agency with the World Bank with regard to achieving target 17.4 and with the World Trade Organization and the International Trade Centre with regard to achieving targets 17.10–17.12. The work of UNCTAD contributes to the achievement of 52 targets under 10 of the Goals. SP5 contributed to the achievement of four Goals, namely 8, 9, 10 and 17, linked to its results during the evaluation period. Several stakeholders echoed *The Least Developed Countries Report 2016: The Path to Graduation and Beyond – Making the Most of the Process* in stating that the achievement of the Goals depended on progress in the least developed countries, where shortfalls from the targets and obstacles to progress are the greatest. The work of ALDC is therefore crucial to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[9] TD/519/Add.2, paragraph 10 (a).
[10] Ibid, paragraphs 10 (b)–(e).

12. To achieve results, SP5 should develop a comprehensive intervention design that encompasses a series of building blocks or outcomes (figure 1).

Figure 1
Programme intervention design



13. Publications are critical for UNCTAD stakeholders to understand important and emerging issues in trade and development. Stakeholder consultations, including with staff, revealed that the research component was the core focus of SP5 and indicated a strong demand for technical cooperation, yet limited resources constrained the ability of SP5 to deliver technical cooperation at an adequate scale. To determine whether SP5 provides relevant products and services to targeted groups, the survey included a question on country needs assessments, whereby respondents were asked to list trade and development challenges in their countries that required the most support from SP5. Capacity development, at 50 per cent; policy support, at 15 per cent; and institutional reforms, at 12 per cent, each a form of technical cooperation, were identified as the most important needs.[11] This suggests that there may be a mismatch between the needs and expectations of stakeholders and the products and services provided under SP5. However, there are four important caveats, as follows:

(a) Most stakeholders acknowledged that research products under SP5 were of high quality and exceeded their expectations;

(b) SP5 cannot provide high quality technical cooperation without the underlying research;

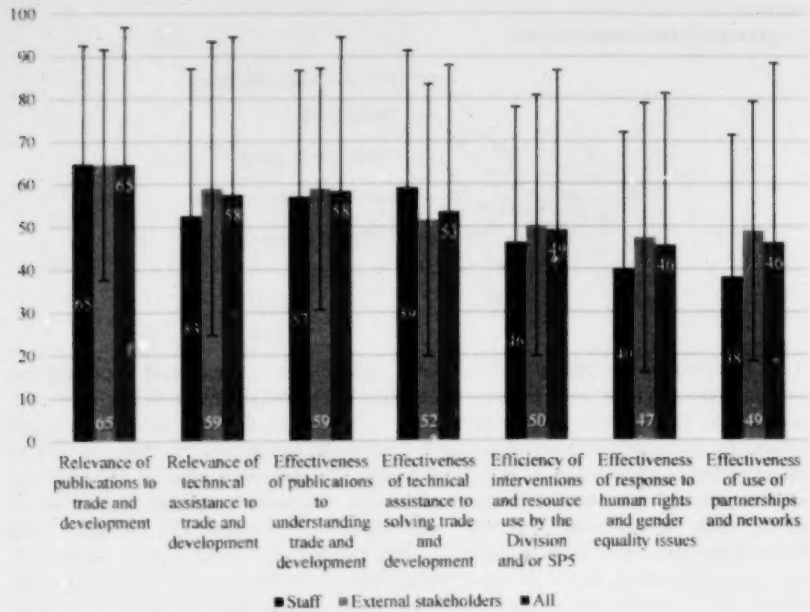
(c) Given current resources and workloads, SP5 is in a difficult position with regard to any further expansion of technical cooperation efforts (see section B);

(d) SP5 has made perceptible efforts to increase extrabudgetary resources to expand its technical cooperation portfolio, for example in the funding obtained from the European Union for the joint project in Angola, yet could benefit from a concrete fundraising strategy at the divisional and/or institutional level.

14. Such challenges may explain why survey respondents, who considered SP5 outputs as highly relevant to their work, assigned a lower overall grade to the relevance of SP5 in addressing their national trade and development situations. The scores were fairly consistent across staff and external stakeholders and were corroborated during interviews (figure 2). Several interviewees stated that SP5 technical cooperation was not adequate to the scale of their needs. Thus, there appears to be a general consensus among stakeholders that the current strategy and resources of SP5 need to be realigned to better address the challenges faced by the countries and stakeholders of focus under SP5.

[11] TD/B/WP(76)/CRP.2, annex VIII, figure 4.

Figure 2
Rating by survey respondents of various aspects of subprogramme 5



Note: The mean and a +/-1 standard deviation range are also depicted.

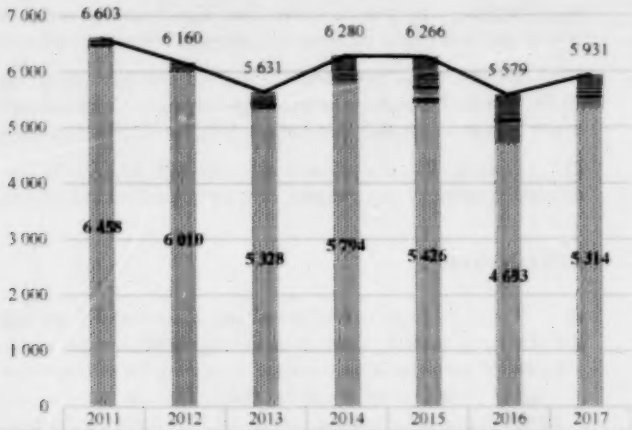
15. Overall, the evaluation finds that SP5 outputs and interventions are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and UNCTAD mandates, yet there is substantial potential for rebalancing the portfolio and realigning resources to truly address the needs of stakeholders.

B. Efficiency

16. The importance of efficiency, or the input–output ratio, was judged, to the extent possible, by establishing counterfactual comparisons between countries with greater and lesser numbers of research projects and by analysing trends over time, keeping in mind the effectiveness of the projects. Broadly, this also included assessing the implementation phase, notably whether resources were being efficiently allocated and utilized and gauging the costs of possible inefficiencies.

17. Staffing costs comprise over 92 per cent of the total expenditures of SP5 of around $6 million per year, with travel, at 2 per cent, and other expenses accounting for the remainder (figure 3). In addition, both the regular and extrabudgetary resources of ALDC have generally been decreasing; following a significant decrease in 2016, there was a slight increase in 2017.

Figure 3
Regular and extrabudgetary expenditures of subprogramme 5 by category, 2011–2017
(Thousands of dollars)



	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Grants out	0	13	33	256	264	133	207
Equipment, vehicles and furniture	112	118	157	218	264	276	187
Miscellaneous	6	0	41	0	45	69	17
Operating and other costs	0	0	0	0	120	385	158
Contractual services	7	4	19	3	49	0	0
Project support costs	7	4	19	3	49	0	0
Training, including participant travel	7	5	20	6	49	0	0
Travel, staff	4	4	13	0	0	21	49
Staff, including consultants	6 458	6 010	5 328	5 794	5 426	4 693	5 314
Total	6 603	6 160	5 631	6 280	6 266	5 579	5 931

18. ALDC has been efficient in meeting its targets with regard to various outputs and publications. ALDC has the highest implementation rate of the UNCTAD publications programme, at 93 per cent, according to data from the Intergovernmental Support Service. As staffing costs are the main costs under SP5, it is important to examine whether these resources are efficiently utilized, through a comparison of available human resources, outputs and self-reported time to generate outputs.[12] According to the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System, all divisions produced more outputs than planned. As the various outputs were not comparable, the evaluation team tallied the self-reported time needed to generate outputs. The data, allowing for a 10 per cent over and under estimation error and adjusting for consultancy periods of three months per year, shows important differences between divisions. ALDC appears to deliver its outputs under resource constraints. As the quality of the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System data underlying this comparison may not be fully reliable, indicating the need for improvements in future planning periods, there is a need to review the data to adjust interdivisional resource allocations, if necessary.

19. Another important consideration in examining efficiency was to determine whether project outputs and outcomes could be obtained through alternative and more cost-effective means. As human resources comprise the most significant costs, some options worth considering, in line with the United Nations system-wide coherence reform, are to decentralize and relocate parts of SP5 to targeted countries and to increase the use of technology for productivity gains. ALDC may need to strengthen its linkages with and/or presence in Addis Ababa for improved effectiveness, through the local context and through better interface with Governments and other regional bodies, and for improved efficiency, by obtaining local expertise at lower costs. From this perspective, UNCTAD and ALDC have some potential to follow the example of United Nations agencies such as the

[12] Ibid, annex VIII, table.

International Labour Organization, who have undertaken steps to relocate technical specialists from headquarters to country and regional offices. However, given the focus of UNCTAD on research and the fact that it is headquarters-based, the first option is of limited utility. UNCTAD could revisit this issue at a later date if changes in circumstances warrant re-evaluation. The second option has significant potential with regard to technical cooperation and virtual presence on country teams and should be explored (see section C).

20. Finally, some interviews highlighted avoidable duplication, such as the fact that ALDC and the Division on International Trade and Commodities have similar programmes, which indicates potential opportunities for greater harmonization and efficiency.

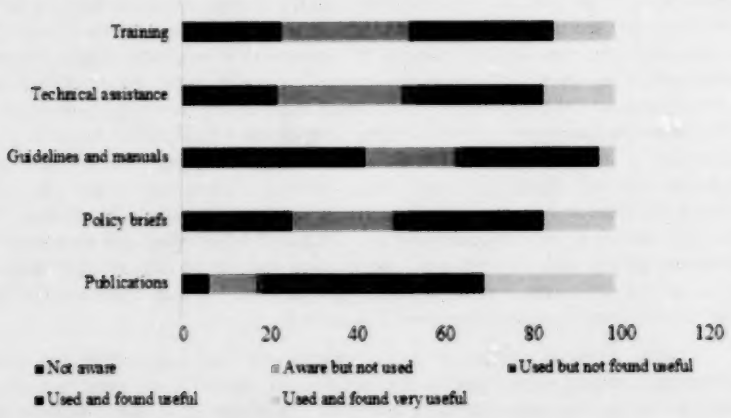
21. Overall, the evaluation finds that SP5 appears to be managing its resources efficiently, although opportunities exist for adjustment and prioritization.

C. Effectiveness

22. The evaluation of effectiveness was concerned with the relationship between outputs and outcomes, such as changes in the regulation and policy environment as a result of technical cooperation. It also entailed examining the effectiveness with which SP5 ensured synergistic contributions under its three pillars of work to achieve long-term impacts. A triangulated comparison was conducted of expected and actual results for each outcome and indicator in the SP5 log frame;[13] this section provides a synopsis of accomplishments.

23. SP5 has made substantial progress on most of its stated outcomes. Stakeholders were generally positive with regard to SP5 products, although some notable variations were observed across various outputs. Respondents found publications to be highly useful; over 80 per cent rated these products as either useful or very useful (figure 4). However, the level of awareness of other products offered by SP5 was lower. These trends largely confirmed the stakeholder observations recorded in interviews, and there was no perceptible difference in this regard between staff and external stakeholders.

Figure 4
Perceived usefulness of subprogramme 5 products by survey respondents
(Percentage)



[13] Ibid, annex I.

24. With regard to research products, respondents rated the SP5 flagship reports highly; over 70 per cent had used these publications and found them useful or very useful.[14] The level of awareness and use of other publications was lower, as expected, since they are not relevant to all users. More importantly, from the perspective of SP5, the share of respondents who found the reports not useful was low, at around 5 per cent.

25. The survey also queried the level of satisfaction with various attributes of critical importance to research.[15] Out of a range from -2 for not at all satisfied to +2 for completely satisfied, the average scores were about one on most attributes (including independence, credibility, analytical depth, topical coverage, relevance to stakeholder work and geographical coverage), indicating that stakeholders were generally satisfied with the quality of research. Interviewees were even more positive in this regard.

26. In addition, the survey requested a ranking with regard to expectations from research by ALDC. Policy relevance, credibility and independence were rated as the most important attributes, and advocacy and programmatic usefulness were rated as the least important attributes.[16] There was consensus among staff and external stakeholders, except with regard to analytical depth, which was considered more important by external stakeholders than staff. However, in interviews and focus group discussions, researchers from ALDC exhibited similar priorities, demonstrating a strategic match with regard to the quality of research under SP5.

27. If publications are to make a difference and contribute to greater impacts, they need to be utilized for a variety of purposes, ranging from programming to policymaking. The survey asked whether and how respondents had used various publications; the main ways in which they had been used were in policy development (23 per cent), research (20 per cent), training (16 per cent), planning (11 per cent) and awareness creation (11 per cent).[17]

28. Interviews revealed that SP5 publications were used as reference material in a variety of policy debates. However, stakeholders could provide few specific policy changes that had resulted. One example provided was of changes in tourism policy made in Mali and Somalia following the publication of *Economic Development in Africa Report 2017: Tourism for Transformative and Inclusive Growth*. Some anecdotal evidence on contributions to policy debates was available in the reports of research institutions such as Brookings Institution and the Turin Centre on Emerging Economies, which had used the report to highlight how tourism could contribute to structural transformation in Africa. Some respondents noted that a report on trade facilitation had been referred to in Djibouti and a report on electronic commerce readiness in policy discussions in Burkina Faso, Liberia, Senegal and countries in Asia and the Pacific. Finally, several countries, such as Nepal, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, had used national vulnerability profiles for decisions with regard to graduation from the least developed country category. Overall, specific studies such as the diagnostic trade integration studies and national vulnerability profiles, as expected, showed a greater contribution to immediate policy outcomes.

29. Another indicator of use is the number of downloads and citations of the flagship reports. The *Economic Development in Africa Report* and *The Least Developed Countries Report* are both popular downloads from the UNCTAD website. As at 31 December 2017, the 2014–2017 editions of the *Economic Development in Africa Report* and *The Least Developed Countries Report* had been downloaded 266,752 and 92,023 times, respectively.[18] A review of Google Scholar data showed that the reports had also been used to some extent for research by policy and development scholars, which is a good proxy indicator of their contribution to policy debates. As at April 2018, the 2014–2017 editions of the *Economic Development in Africa Report* had been cited 13 times and the 2010–2013 editions, 107 times. Editions of *The Least Developed Countries Report* from the corresponding periods had received 27 and 57 citations, respectively. As citations have a

[14] Ibid, annex VIII, figure 5.
[15] Ibid, annex VIII, figure 6.
[16] Ibid, annex VIII, figure 7.
[17] Ibid, annex VIII, figure 8.
[18] Ibid, annex V.

significant time lag, these numbers should be used as baseline information in future evaluations. In 2014–April 2018, the *Economic Development in Africa Report* was mentioned in 283 stories in the media and *The Least Developed Countries Report* in 262 stories. Previous evaluations of UNCTAD work had identified poor outreach and dissemination as one of the main issues to be addressed under the research pillar. As evidenced from the number of downloads and media statistics, perceptible improvements have been made in this regard. UNCTAD needs to continue building on this success.

30. Technical cooperation is the second pillar of work carried out under SP5. It is a relatively small component with regard to human and financial resources. The share of ALDC in the annual technical cooperation expenditures of UNCTAD of about $40 million is 9 per cent.[19] Survey responses were not tabulated as only 20 respondents reported having received technical cooperation under SP5; over 90 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of technical cooperation provided. This was in line with the post-workshop feedback forms examined by the evaluation team. For example, participants in regional workshops in Addis Ababa and Manila rated the quality, relevance and usefulness of discussions at about 4.5 out of 5. They also rated attributes such as training content, professionalism, innovativeness and stakeholder engagement as better than that offered by other providers of similar technical cooperation.

31. Interviews and survey data revealed that there is strong demand for SP5 technical cooperation and that it is valued highly in policy deliberations. Several stakeholders reported having used it for a relevant purpose such as policy formulation, planning and the training of others. This information was not systematically collected, yet the survey and interviews revealed some prominent examples. Ethiopia had used the diagnostic trade integration study to mainstream trade into its five-year national plan. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization had also used this study to develop its programme for country partnership in Ethiopia and the World Bank had also referred to the study for policy formulations in Ethiopia. An Enhanced Integrated Framework project on honey and chili for exports from Ethiopia to Europe had led to the acceptance of a proposal by the European Union, currently being finalized by ALDC. Geographical indications and cassava-related projects in Cambodia were also reported as having been referred to with regard to policy changes. As a result of inputs received, Cambodia had updated its value chain development strategy and the Gambia had updated its entrepreneurship development policies. A new approach to the diversification of markets in Cambodia, for example, was linked to a trade development support programme.

32. Stakeholder consultations also revealed some weaknesses and challenges in delivering technical cooperation, notably with regard to collaboration on Enhanced Integrated Framework projects. Some stakeholders felt that ALDC was not transparent and forthcoming in sharing information, even on issues pertaining to the domains of expertise of other divisions, perhaps due to resource-sharing issues. Others suggested that better collaboration among divisions could help avoid duplication. Some key partners, although satisfied with the quality of products delivered, reported discontent over some delays, and identified collaboration and information-sharing as weaknesses under SP5, which they suggested could be linked to resource constraints.

33. Some stakeholders suggested that small technical cooperation projects could be an issue from the perspective of both effectiveness, given an inadequate scale to make a difference, and efficiency, since bureaucratic processes remained the same, and welcomed recent developments with regard to creating a consolidated regional programmatic approach.

34. Consensus-building, including norm-setting, is the third pillar of work carried out under SP5. One of the expected outcomes of the outputs of ALDC is that the flagship reports will be reflected in agreed conclusions adopted by the Trade and Development Board. In this regard, the evaluation team compared the policy recommendations made in the reports with the agreed conclusions of the Board in the period covered by the

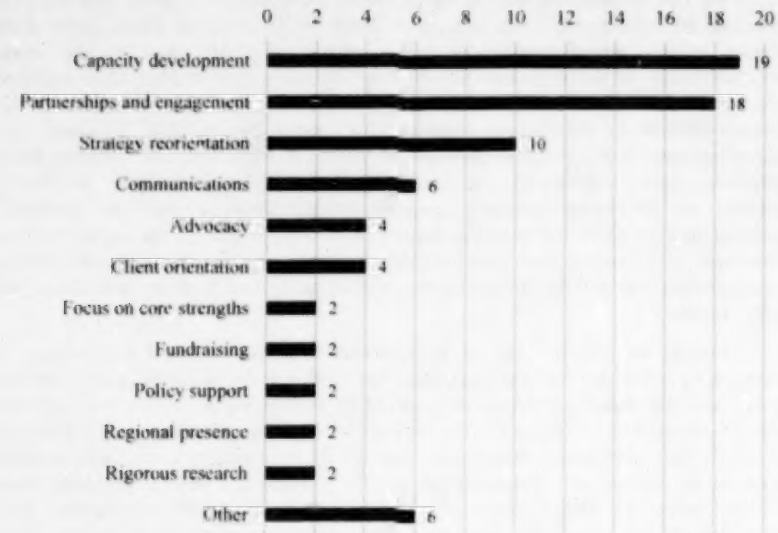
[19] Ibid, annex VII.

evaluation, and the comparison showed that the recommendations were generally considered. The reports were not specified in agreed conclusions in 2014 and 2016; both were specified in agreed conclusions and/or the reports of the sessions in 2015 and 2017. Four of the five recommendations in the *Economic Development in Africa Report 2015: Unlocking the Potential of Africa's Services Trade for Growth and Development* were reflected in the agreed conclusions of the Board. Similarly, four of the seven recommendations in the *Economic Development in Africa Report 2017* were reflected in the agreed conclusions of the Board. The reports were also cited in reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, in particular in 2014. Similarly, the recommendations from *The Least Developed Countries Report 2015: Transforming Rural Economies*, which emphasized the continued importance of developing productive capacities and promoting structural economic transformation in the least developed countries, were noted by the executive session of the Board. Finally, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported using the national vulnerability profiles produced by SP5 in considering the issue of graduation from the least developed country category.

35. Overall, the effectiveness of both publications and technical cooperation in addressing trade and development challenges was rated near the midpoint by both internal and external stakeholders. Publications received an average score of 58 out of 100 and technical cooperation, 53 (figure 2). This may seem surprising given that all SP5 products and services are individually rated highly, and may be explained by a mismatch between the needs and expectations of stakeholders and the products and services provided under SP5 (see section A). Stakeholder recommendations to increase SP5 effectiveness shed further light on this aspect. The evaluation team used textual analysis though the Word Clouds website to develop a codebook for analysing the qualitative recommendations, which was then used to manually tabulate responses (figure 5).[20] The most highly recommended areas in which SP5 might improve its performance were capacity development, at 25 per cent; partnerships, at 23 per cent; and strategy reorientation, at 13 per cent. Interviews provided more in-depth corroboration and suggested that limited resources in combination with short production cycles and annual reports on widely divergent topics constrained the ability of SP5 to provide adequate follow-up support. Some stakeholders were not in favour of reducing the frequency of flagship publications from annual to biennial in consideration of that fact that this might lead to a reduction in the budget of SP5; other stakeholders were in favour of serious consideration of this option to provide greater resource capacity for post-publication technical cooperation for member States.

[20] Ibid.

Figure 5
Intervention recommendations for subprogramme 5 by survey respondents
(Number of citations)



36. Taking the above information into account, the evaluation finds that the products and services provided by SP5 are generally considered of a high quality. As a result, SP5 has made significant strides in achieving intended outcomes. However, to realize its true potential in the next phase, SP5 may need to rebalance its product portfolio between research and technical cooperation. This also has implications on impact and sustainability.

D. Impact and sustainability

37. Impact refers to the achievement of objectives concerning long-term benefits to beneficiaries, including institutional, policy-related and social transformations; sustainability refers to the ability of beneficiaries to sustain the trajectory of progress made. A significant portion of UNCTAD work pertains to the countries specified in the mandate of SP5. However, ALDC is the only division with a focus on countries with structural limitations that require special attention.

38. The establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area in Africa and the Djibouti–Ethiopia corridor are two significant achievements to which UNCTAD contributed during the evaluation period. ALDC was not the lead division on negotiations, yet provided important inputs on geographical indications that contributed to the negotiations on the Continental Free Trade Area, and was also involved in providing local knowledge and inputs to the lead division. With regard to the Djibouti–Ethiopia corridor, the diagnostic trade integration study led by SP5 was one of the major provisions of technical cooperation in the undertaking of the project. SP5 also initiated the launch of centres of excellence on fisheries in Mauritius and Viet Nam, which are expected to play an important role in sharing knowledge of the sector in the respective regions.

39. Stakeholders suggested that they used SP5 research as reference material to understand emerging trends and challenges in the field of trade and development. However, stakeholders could not provide examples of specific policy changes attributed to such research. A lack of systematic collection of such information by SP5 also makes it challenging to authoritatively establish accomplishments in this regard, reflective of a more general weakness in practicing results-based management at UNCTAD, as noted in

previous subprogramme evaluations. However, some qualitative evidence suggests that many of the policy recommendations are being adopted into policies by member States.[21] For example, following the preparation of diagnostic trade integration studies, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger and Senegal initiated the mainstreaming of trade into their respective national development plans. The establishment of the centres of excellence in Mauritius and Viet Nam has generated interest in regional information sharing and learning. Similarly, Angola, Bhutan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic have integrated UNCTAD policy recommendations into their respective graduation strategies. In Vanuatu, UNCTAD assistance in formulating a smooth national transition strategy was in support of the request of the Government for consideration as a small island developing State rather than a least developed country. A capacity development project in Ethiopia and a geographical indications project in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, for example, assisted farmers in improving their performance in export markets for coffee and palm sugar, respectively.

40. The evaluation does not suggest that SP5 has strayed from its core competencies or that it is dissipating its resources too thinly, but that it needs to be aware of the need for course correction. For its work to have meaningful impacts and ensure sustained results, SP5 needs to allow for adequate time for follow-up support to member States. Perhaps more importantly, SP5 also needs to redesign its flagship reports in a manner that provides some continuity with previous reports, such as by including an update on the theme(s) from the previous report(s) or by choosing topics that are more closely interlinked. Such strategies will not only sustain the ripples of a ripple-effect strategy for longer and allow them to reach further, but also develop deeper in-house capacity, in order that staff will not need to start from scratch with each new theme.

41. With regard to sustainability, the available evidence suggests that the technical capacity of targeted countries to produce and use evidence-based policymaking has improved, yet this has not yet been institutionalized to the extent that it can be assumed to be self-sustaining. Further, given the one-time nature of many SP5 interventions, sustainability does not seem to be an integral consideration in project design. In addition, as the success of the 2030 Agenda rests on successes in the countries of focus of SP5, the need for continued support is readily apparent.

42. SP5 is essentially following a ripple-effect strategy whereby research, which lies at the core of the strategy, is used as the impact that generates waves, creating awareness for change, which in turn lead to demand for technical cooperation and, together, research and technical cooperation lead to debates, to the evolution of new norms and new consensus and to new policies (figure 1). Such changes are ultimately expected to improve trade and development in targeted countries. However, in contrast with other divisions, which produce reports on one underlying theme such as investment or the information economy ALDC seeks to cover a lot of ground on issues concerning its target audience and, as a result, the themes of its flagship publications vary significantly. In 2013–2018, the themes of the *Economic Development in Africa Report* were private sector dynamism, investment for transformative growth, services trade, debt dynamics and development finance, tourism and migration. In 2013–2016, the themes of *The Least Developed Countries Report* were growth with employment, the post-2015 development agenda, transforming rural economies and the path to graduation. These topics are broadly related, creating ripples in the same pond, albeit in somewhat different sections, yet it is a challenge to sustain momentum towards a lasting impact. This is relevant in particular in the context of the limited resources at the disposal of ALDC that need to be engaged in a continuous production cycle. Stakeholder consultations revealed that even before one report is published, ALDC must begin work on the next report. It was clear from interviews that SP5 had inadequate resources for follow-up support.

43. Overall, the evaluation finds that while SP5 is making a perceptible impact, strategic adjustments and sustained efforts will be critical for further trade and development in the countries of focus under SP5.

[21] See A/71/75 and A/73/77.

E. Partnerships

44. Partnerships are critical to the success of all United Nations entities. However, they are critical in particular for UNCTAD given its limited presence in the field. UNCTAD needs to work with the offices of the United Nations Resident Coordinators and other partner entities to extend its reach and visibility. However, many stakeholders suggested that forging partnerships and networks has traditionally been a challenge for UNCTAD, and this was reflected in the low scores for ALDC in this area.[22] This is true for both in-house and inter-agency collaboration. In recognition of this challenge, senior leadership at UNCTAD and ALDC have recently undertaken a number of steps to promote collaboration and partnerships, such as the UNCTAD interdivisional publications committee, the proposal to jointly publish the *Economic Development in Africa Report* with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the joint Train for Trade project in Angola with the European Union and, in particular, the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity. The Cluster, led by UNCTAD and consisting of 15 resident and non-resident United Nations agencies, has been actively involved in the "Delivering as one" initiative by coordinating participation at the national, regional and global levels. In the framework of the Cluster, as at September 2017, UNCTAD was part of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in 34 countries, including many of the least developed countries. However, more needs to be done to incentivize institutionalized collaboration.

45. One of the emerging issues in 2017 was the review of the work of the United Nations at the country level, with the advance report in June of the Secretary-General on the system-wide repositioning of the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. UNCTAD participated in this work through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and the updated document was presented to Member States at a briefing by the Deputy Secretary-General in October. The second report of the Secretary-General was issued on 21 December 2017.[23] The future role of UNCTAD on the ground remains to be determined as, generally, UNCTAD has a limited presence on country teams.[24] The resolution on repositioning the United Nations development system was adopted in May 2018 in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system and requested the Secretary-General to lead the efforts of the entities of the United Nations development system to collaboratively implement a new generation of United Nations country teams, with a needs-based tailored country presence, to be built on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, positioning it as the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country, in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

46. Many stakeholders echoed the sentiment of survey respondents that UNCTAD was disadvantaged by not having ears to the ground, networks, relationships and consultations. Some stated that UNCTAD should be more visible in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks to advance the trade and development agenda in member States. In this regard, the initiative of the Office of the Secretary-General in 2015 to establish a regional office in Addis Ababa has already yielded important results for UNCTAD, such as with regard to the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area. Other stakeholders noted that a physical presence would not be necessary for well-established partnerships. In leading the United Nations Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, UNCTAD is in effect promoting joint operations with the combined participation of resident and non-resident agencies. Joint operations developed in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks bring policy coherence and results at the country level. In the future, the role of the Cluster may be further developed as an inter-agency mechanism for responding to envisaged "One United Nations" initiative

[22] TD/B/WP(76)/CRP.2, annex VIII, figure 4.

[23] A/72/684–E/2018/7.

[24] UNCTAD is a member of 15 country teams, of which seven are in Africa or in a least developed country. However it is generally headquarters staff who represent UNCTAD (see https://undg.org/about/un-country-level/).

reforms.[25] The Cluster would be particularly relevant in assisting the United Nations system in enhancing its capacities related to integrated policy advice, as well as in achieving greater integration and cohesiveness at the country level to expand the offer of whole-of system expertise to countries.[26]

47. Desk review and stakeholder consultations showed that SP5, in general, has been better at forging partnerships with direct beneficiaries.[27] However, several interviewees suggested that such collaboration was mostly at the personal level, with notable exceptions such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the preparation of the diagnostic trade integration study in Ethiopia with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and indicated the need for the greater institutionalization of such partnerships. Increased institutional partnerships with entities such as, among others, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (both members of the Cluster), were being considered.

48. Interviewees also noted several challenges and opportunities for partnership development. First, competition for limited resources across various agencies and programmes leads to challenges in promoting trust and partnerships. Second, despite similarities in mandates and thematic focus, differences in capacity levels, strategic visions and expertise pose serious challenges that weaken cooperation. Third, partnerships at the headquarters level are not always systematically replicated at local levels and vice versa. Fourth, partnerships with academia, research institutions and civil society are limited and mostly informal in nature. However, ALDC has shown a willingness to further enhance such ties to embed UNCTAD research into policy debates.

49. Finally, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, which supports the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, covers much of the same substantive areas as SP5. The two organizational units are of approximately the same size. UNCTAD has technical capacity yet lacks a significant presence in New York, necessary for greater policy impacts; the Office of the High Representative has such a presence yet lacks technical capacity. A textual analysis of reports of the Office of the High Representative revealed a mixed picture with regard to the use of UNCTAD reports. In 2014, there was considerable overlap and, subsequently, there has been less. In 2017, there was a greater connection, yet this was not made explicit in the report of the Office of the High Representative. At the UNCTAD level, it is necessary to explore how such synergies could be better institutionalized and exploited. However, the evaluation finds that there is a prima facie case that member States should commission a study to specifically examine, from the perspectives of both efficiency and effectiveness, the relationship, synergies and working modalities between the two entities.

50. Overall, the evaluation finds that SP5 has significant potential to harness its technical expertise and forge partnerships within and beyond UNCTAD, to increase its efficiency, effectiveness and impact and sustainability.

F. Human rights and gender equality

51. Project documents showed the important role of UNCTAD in creating understanding and in advancing the differential impacts of trade and development in different sections of society, and this recognition was corroborated during interviews. Despite this high relevance and the commitment to integrate and mainstream human rights and gender equality, SP5 and projects remain largely human rights and gender-blind in their design. Human rights and gender sensitive situation analysis, prioritization and planning are often missing. This has limited the involvement of relevant human rights and gender equality stakeholders, who may have helped in understanding and prioritizing human rights and gender equality issues in the projects and SP5. This is despite the fact that equity

[25] See A/72/684–E/2018/7, paragraphs 19 and 22.

[26] Ibid.

[27] TD/B/WP(76)/CRP.2, annex VI.

considerations lie at the heart of the work of UNCTAD in general, and of SP5 in particular. However, given the increased internal and external demand for research and technical cooperation that addresses human rights and gender equality-related data and knowledge gaps, new opportunities seem to be emerging. Recent interest in the fisheries sector, for example, appears to be driven in part by the desire to assist women, youth and other underprivileged groups, who are disproportionately represented in this sector.

52. With regard to gender parity, ALDC has better representation by women among its professional and general staff than UNCTAD as a whole, but not in leadership and consultant positions (table). ALDC should look for opportunities to redress this imbalance.

Gender representation among staff members

	Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes			*UNCTAD*		
	Men	Women	Total number of staff members	Men	Women	Total number of staff members
	(Percentage)			*(Percentage)*		
Professional	60	40	25	66	34	335
General	14	86	7	24	76	149
Consultant	80	20	45	59	41	422
Total number of staff members	**52**	**25**	**77**	**531**	**375**	**906**

53. With regard to contributions to understanding and promoting the human rights and gender equality agenda of the United Nations, respondents gave SP5, on average, 46 points out of 100. Staff members were somewhat more critical than external stakeholders, which perhaps indicates their expectation that SP5 should have a greater role in advancing the human rights and gender equality agenda.

54. Overall, while recognizing the efforts made by UNCTAD and ALDC to mainstream the human rights and gender equality agenda in recent research and publications, as well as the appointment of gender focal points and the sensitization of technical cooperation (such as a project on geographical indications in Benin that targeted women producers and flagship reports that pay increasing attention to gender issues), the evaluation finds that there is a need for enhanced gender-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data collection, gender-sensitive methodologies and analysis, gender-responsive capacity-building, strategic partnerships and gender parity at UNCTAD.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

55. The evaluation concludes that SP5 is making a substantial contribution towards its stated objective of promoting evidence-based national policies and international support measures on trade, economic development and poverty reduction in the countries of focus under SP5. The work of SP5 has improved the effectiveness of international responses to current and emerging challenges in the field of trade and development.

56. Each of the outputs produced by SP5 are of high quality and relevant to UNCTAD mandates and stakeholder needs, yet the portfolio as a whole is in need of rebalancing in favour of increased technical cooperation, which will help to strengthen synergies across the three pillars of its work.

57. The ripple-effect strategy pursued by SP5, with research as the core driver, is essentially sound, yet needs to be accompanied by periodic boosters, to sustain momentum towards lasting impacts.

58. The capacity of targeted countries to sustain trade and development efforts has improved, yet has not yet reached a stage where it can be deemed self-sustainable. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, this suggests a need for the continuation of, or even an increase in, support.

59. UNCTAD and SP5 have recently taken substantial steps towards developing partnerships, yet given a lack of UNCTAD presence on ground, there is a need to do significantly more with regard to leveraging partnerships for visibility and policy impact.

60. There is a need to integrate the work of the regional office in Africa into ALDC, for increased efficiency, effectiveness and synergies.

61. SP5 has been effective in reporting its activities and outputs on an annual basis, yet there is a clear need for regular monitoring and reporting on outcomes and impacts. In the absence of a sound monitoring and evaluation system, outcomes and impacts cannot be ascertained with the requisite precision.

62. ALDC has made some progress on human rights and gender equality issues, yet there is a need for an enhanced and systematic human rights and gender equality approach in future programming.

63. The evaluation recommends the following:

(a) ALDC is encouraged to continue rebalancing its portfolio and to fine-tune its strategy by increasing emphasis on technical cooperation and follow-up support. UNCTAD should undertake an evaluation to revisit workplans and budgets, to inform interdivisional resource (re)allocations;

(b) ALDC should make sustainability considerations an integral part of its interventions, as follows:

(i) Build in thematic continuity in research and programmatic continuity in technical cooperation;

(ii) Ensure periodic follow-up and synergies in research and technical cooperation interventions;

(c) UNCTAD and ALDC should develop strategies for raising extrabudgetary resources to increase the technical cooperation portfolio, to better meet stakeholder needs;

(d) The management of UNCTAD and ALDC should develop an overarching road map for increased partnerships and collaboration at the institutional level, as follows:

(i) Increase incentives for staff to actively seek collaboration, both in-house and with other United Nations entities;

(ii) Institutionalize and strengthen collaborations with other United Nations agencies;

(iii) Increase the number of United Nations country teams in areas in which UNCTAD carries out substantial work;

(e) UNCTAD should consider a matrix organizational structure for its office in Addis Ababa. The office should continue to report directly to the Office of the Secretary-General, yet should also have stronger linkages and reporting responsibilities to the director of ALDC;

(f) ALDC should institute the systematic collection of data on its purported impacts and outcomes, as follows:

(i) Improve the results-based monitoring system for the better measurement of outcomes and impacts;

(ii) Involve member States and partner agencies in monitoring and evaluation;

(iii) Assign specific results-based management roles and responsibilities to staff and partners;

(g) UNCTAD and ALDC should increase current efforts and integrate human rights and gender equality issues in interventions, to better deliver on the mandates and commitments of the United Nations.